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ABSTRACT

Screening of students who may require special services by the Indianapolis Public Schools is conducted by Special Service Teams, which are composed of representatives of the special education, social services, psychological services, and guidance departments. The special services offerings of the team, case conferencing, and placement, are distinct and separate from curriculum division programs. In addition, the high schools have different kinds of needs requiring a different approach. Personal histories, for example, are taken from the high school student rather than from the parent. A problem occurring for all grade ranges is reevaluation, which is required by law every 3 years. Problems not readily solved include: paperwork to provide documentation for compliance, communication, the number of people involved in information sharing, the decision-making inertia shown by private schools, and student mobility. These factors contribute to problems of management in accomplishing the team's objectives and requirements of Public Law 94-142. Involvement of teachers in team meetings at points of decision-making has resulted in teachers feeling more a part of the team process, as well as their gaining new insights about both the child's problems and remediation approaches. Directives and memoranda released simultaneously by school districts has been an important method of communicating uniformly to the team members outside the group meeting. Providing an inservice for the respective buildings at least once a year conveys to staff the team's purpose, as well as providing a communication link. (SEW)

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THE SPECIAL SERVICE TEAMS OF THE INDIANAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

A PANEL DISCUSSION FOCUSING ON -

"SCHOOL BASED STUDENT SERVICE TEAMS"

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SPECIAL SERVICES DIVISION - INDIANAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SPECIAL SERVICE TEAMS

The Indianapolis Public Schools serve an industrial city of about 700,000 persons residing in a metropolitan area of about 1.1 million. The school district is located in the central city ringed by 10 suburban township districts. The system comprises 67 elementary schools, 12 junior high schools (grades 7-8), 9 senior high schools with a total (Kg-12) enrollment of about 55,500 students. This figure has dwindled from a high of over 109,000 in the late 1960's to the present enrollment.

Since the late 1960's, the system has undergone a long term desegregation suit which culminated in massive desegregation to township schools, located in the suburbs, in the fall of 1981. Coupled with population decreases and out-migration, the system has shrunk, not only in enrollment, but in staff who were separated by reductions in force or were not replaced as retirements and resignations occurred.

Special education classes and programs in all categories are offered throughout the system. About 7,300 students are served by these programs, which in addition to all sort of classroom offerings, include a special campus facility for the moderately and severely/profoundly mentally handicapped and another facility for physically handicapped.

The Special Services Division contains the Special Education Department, Social Service Department, Psychological Services Department and Guidance Department and serves all of the buildings of IPS as well as the private schools in the IPS district. Special Service Teams composed of representatives of the four departments in the division serve as a mechanism for screening students who may require special services.

Historically, special education began in IPS the last century but was informal, sporadic and not organized. It was not until the 1950's that Special Education services began to emerge. In the 1950's and early to the mid 1960's classes were organized for MMH and to some degree, emotionally disturbed children. In the early 1950's the Psychological Services Department was founded and joined with the social work staff, which had been established in 1897, to form some teaming with respect to children with exceptional needs.

Experimental L.D. programs were begun in 1964 and when Indiana Rule S-1, a state mandate for special education, came into being in 1969, some attempt was made to start a multi-disciplinary conference to place students. The conference teacher position was then introduced in the mid 1970's so that with the conference teacher, psychologist and social worker together with regular teachers and other building personnel, the outlines of a team emerged.

Formalized teaming in pilot form came in the late 1970's and with the beginning of the 1980's the Special Service Team (SST), responding to P.L. 94-142 and Rule S-1, was formed. Each of the functionaries mentioned together with the principal now comprise the basic team. Ad hoc members are added from time-to-time. There are also review boards, the Central Review Team (CRT), composed of a member of each discipline; and the Administrative Review Team (ART), which is comprised of the supervisory staff of the departments furnishing team members. Appeals to these bodies are made under very special procedural requirements.

In IPS, the Special Service Division is wholly separate from the Curriculum Division. Students who are not placed in special education may require help from curriculum division personnel. With this separation, the special services offerings of the team, case conferencing, and placement, represent a

distinct and separate service (in many respects) from the programs offered by the curriculum division.

As the team concept has emerged and matured, problems have surfaced. Since the personnel comprising the team are itinerant, tracking of team members, and keeping them in place on the team meeting day has presented problems. The team meetings have encountered problems of attendance, length, (tending to be too long) and sometimes, "turfing", which has surfaced as another concern.

The position of Special Service Team Consultant, which was created with the advent of the teams, has helped to deal with these problems in a variety of ways by providing a single individual to whom procedural and technical questions as well as other concerns may be directed. The SST consultant directs department managerial problems to the proper department so that the supervisor or other management personnel representing that department may intercede. Problems often arise in connection with concerns expressed by building administrators over process, participation of certain functionaries and occasionally, personality matters. This kind of structuring with the SST consultant and the distinctive separations by department for supervisory purposes has promoted communication and coordination of services. The central office management group itself serves as a team model since each discipline is represented.

Emphasis has been put on the efficient use of time and various mechanisms such as an agenda, flow charts, and sign-in/sign-out sheets which have been employed to provide management tools, and to add to efficiency.

Over time it was learned that the high schools have different kinds of needs so that gradually there developed a different approach in that setting. Personal histories, for example, are taken from the student not the parent,

as in K-8. The educational history per se is not too relevant in the high school but the cumulative record becomes more important. Inservice, which flows very well at the elementary school level, is not as easily accomplished for high school faculty because of the high degree of departmentalization. In junior high, structured more along high school lines, the problems are similar. A problem running through all grade ranges is reevaluation which is required by law each three years. There seem to be certain schools where, because of a larger than average number of special education classes, reevaluation backlogs occur. Efforts are being made to deal with this matter.

Certain problems are not readily solved and are still in the process of study and remediation. Among others are the paper work (in order to provide documentation for compliance), communication, the number of people involved in information sharing, the decision-making inertia shown by private schools, and student mobility. These factors, contribute to problems of management in accomplishing the objectives of P.L. 94-142 and the teams. In addition, the equalization of work loads among teams has been a concern. Finally, such things as the personalities involved, the role changes, the accommodation necessary as these functionaries work closer together and "team" to share tasks (and sometimes sub for one another) also have presented problems.

In role modification, because of the need to assign certain specific tasks to some functionaries on the one hand and to permit sharing on the other, sorting out was a problem. Even the matter of involving parents, getting signatures and insuring parental attendance at proper times have been delegated primarily to individual team members but also, are in one sense, the task of all. Team members must demonstrate their particular expertise and skill in their respective areas but not try to dominate.

People also must place themselves before their peers as professionals and judgments are sometimes inevitable. Sharing responsibilities and information is sometimes a problem in that some members wish to share too much, and others do not wish to share enough. Also, the matters of attending case conferences, conducting case conferences, and recording or merely participating in case conferences poses problems from time-to-time. In addition, teachers have been required to make role modifications. Resistance has been high in some areas since, at one time, a simple referral often guaranteed the removal of a student from a regular class. Now the due-process nature of P.L. 94-142 and the requirement that all remedies have to be exhausted before further steps are taken is sometimes an obstacle to some teachers. Teachers have had to accommodate and refocus their perspective with regard to special education and special programs.

However, there are some advantages. For example, involvement of teachers in team meetings at points of decision-making, such as when the decision is made to evaluate, has resulted in teachers feeling more a part of the team process. They report gaining new insight into the child's problems and how to meet them as a result of sharing in team discussion.

Other benefits have developed including some excellent communication and management techniques as a result of the team effort. Meetings by district, since the division is divided into four geographical districts with four district offices, have proven an excellent communication means. All members are present, messages, whether they be about procedural matters, concerns and gripes, or inservice items for the team members, reach all members in one district at the same time and all hear the same message. Also, providing special programs for the junior high only from time-to-time has helped a great deal. The two-way dialogue between administration and the respective

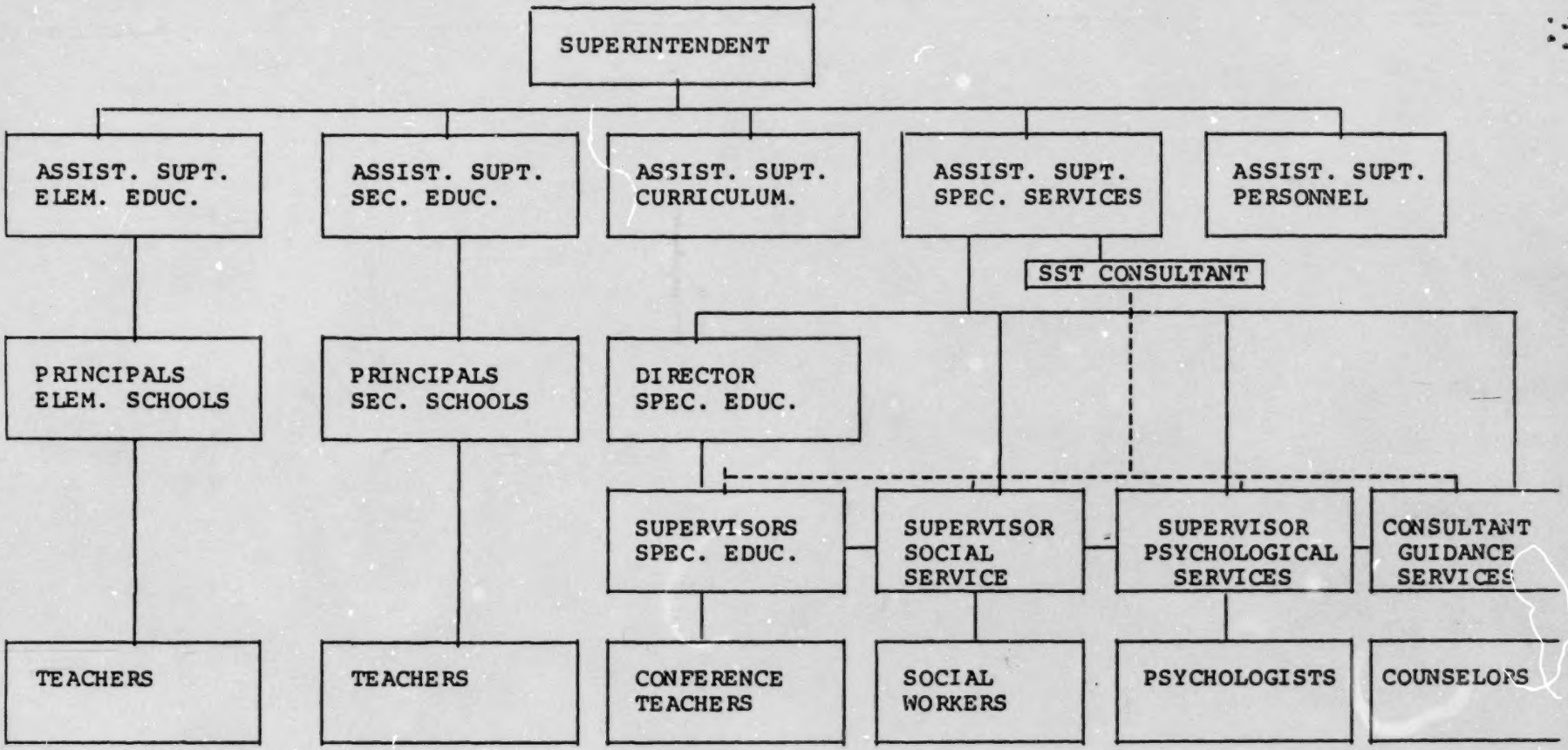
district groups during the course of the meetings has been quite fruitful. Furthermore, during the first two years of the program, advisory committees, composed of principals, were very useful and were indeed adopted for a year by other divisions in the system at the direction of the superintendent. It was learned that uniform written directives and memoranda released simultaneously to the functionaries is an important method of providing new information, changing or setting new policy, or otherwise communicating uniformly to the team members as a whole outside the group meeting.

Another valuable mechanism is the regularly scheduled meetings of the management group, themselves a team model, representing the four areas of practice and the SST consultant. These regularly scheduled meetings have fostered increasingly fruitful discussions and interchange among the management group. They provide a forum to air concerns, problem solve, consider and restate policy, and to develop new policy.

Another useful practice has been the selection of a single team member, the social worker, as the permanent chair of the team. This has made communication from management and to management quite simple and is a ready channel to reach team members and/or to receive information from team members. Use of the agenda, i.e., keeping the agenda, collecting it and retaining it as a record of the activities of the team, also has been an outstanding aid.

Finally, mandating that each team provide an inservice for the respective buildings at least once a year has been an excellent way to convey to the staff members of the school the team's purpose, strengths and limitations and also to provide a communication link between the school and the team. Because of the nature of referrals, not all teachers in a given building

use the team evenly, therefore inservice meetings and occasional appearances before faculties tend to even out the exposure of the team to the faculty. Bringing together the faculty and the team in the faculty meeting has proven to be a positive force.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